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A DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS OF MANKIND?

Erik H. Erikson

When Dr. Lapid asked me to make some opening remarks to this morning's meeting which calls for "new prescriptions" coming from psychology and related fields, two words made me agree to try: he suggested as my title a "developmental crisis" of mankind?"

It was the combination of the words developmental and crisis that made me feel at home, for it implies that developmentally speaking, true crises are not merely caused by sudden extreme dangers but by a confrontation of a vital danger with an implicit positive challenge. The evolution of a mankind that can save itself in a crisis such as we are facing now must somehow have prepared us for it.

" Now, I think that I have been asked to speak on this subject because I have for many years attempted to grasp a phenomenon most decisive in the development of human individuals as well as of groups: I have called it PSEUDO-SPECIATION. It means that mankind, while one species, has throughout its history divided itself - territorially, culturally, and politically - into seemingly different species which permitted each "species," at decisive times, to consider itself the only truly human and, in fact, immortal species, and all others - and especially some others - as less human and, in fact, non-human. At the

same time, mankind as a whole has developed technologically to a point where any pseudo-species can save itself from what it considers to be the malicious intentions of another, equally powerful one only by risking the total annihilation of the whole species.

So let me now enlarge on pseudo-speciation as I have done in my writings so that the discussion, based on different fields, can either appropriate or, indeed, refute it: this, as I do speak first, is the chance I invite. Spelled out once more: that mankind since its earliest times has appeared on the world scene and continues to do so split up into collectivities (tribes and nations, castes and classes, religions and ideologies)

which provide their members with a more-or-less firm sense of distinct and superior identity - and a kind of historical immortality in history. Some have, of course, mythologized for themselves a place and a moment in the apparent center of the universe where and when an especially provident deity caused it to be created superior to all others, the less than mortals.

One could go far back into prehistory and envisage <sup>primitive</sup> man, the most naked and - except for its decisive erectness - least identifiable creature by natural markings. He could adorn himself flamboyantly with feathers, pelts, and paints and elevate his own kind into a mythological species, often named by whatever word he had for "the people." / Now, the term "pseudo," at its friendliest, as used in the natural sciences, means only that something has come to appear to be what it is not, -here, a separate species; and, indeed, in the name of his pseudo-

< families and professional groups etc.)

species man could endow himself and his universe with tools and weapons, roles and rules, with legends, myths, and rituals, which bound his group together and gave to its existence such super-individual significance as inspires hard work, as well as great virtues, such as loyalty and heroism, and the poetry of the arts. One may also assume that some tribes and cultures have for long periods peacefully cultivated just such an existence. What renders this "natural" process a potential malignancy of universal dimensions, however, is the fact that in times of *in human history* threatening change and sudden upheaval the idea of being the foremost species must be reinforced by a fanatic fear and hate of other pseudo-species. That these others, therefore, must be annihilated or kept "in their places" by periodical warfare or conquest as well as by stringent legislation or custom - that becomes a periodical and often reciprocal obsession of mankind.

At its unfriendliest, then, "pseudo" means that somebody is trying with all the semi-sincerity of propaganda to put something over on himself as well as on others. This "pseudo" aspect of man's collective identities can become dominant under the impact of historical and economic dangers, which make a group's self-idealization both more defensive and more exclusive. As history now shows, this process is so fundamental to man that the pseudo-species mentality can refuse to yield even to the shared human gains in knowledge and experience acquired through vast cultural and technological progress. The most "advanced" nations do harbor, and in fact can make fanatically explicit, a mystical adherence to the mentality of the pseudo-species.



The total victory of such a mentality in an enlightened modern nation was horrifyingly exemplified in Hitler's Germany.

History, however, provides examples of such development by which the pseudo-species mentality or warring groups can become shared by new collectives and thus disarmed within a wider identity. Territorial unification is one way: the Pax Romana embraced races, nations and classes. Technological advances in universal "traffic," too, unite: seafaring, mechanized locomotion and wireless communication each have helped to spread changes which eventually bind a sense of widening identity and help to overcome economic fear, the anxiety of culture change, and the dread of a spiritual or ideological vacuum.

To such a basic human phenomenon any one professional worker can only contribute those insights he can grasp with the concepts at his disposal at his historical moment. Shortly after coming to America, I formulated the concept of "identity crisis," which is now being used rather widely - so widely that it is being made fun of in an occasional cartoon: no small recognition for a developmental term. I have had reason to point out, however, that I might not have thought of this term, nor have been listened to, if I had not come to this country. For by her very history and nature, our country has initiated the most extensive historical attempt to create a new national identity out of the identities of immigrants coming from all the extant nations and cultures of the world; and Lincoln, with his passionate restraint, called Americans the "almost chosen people." A new

U.S.

great example of a historical development which may ~~be~~ making yet ~~the~~ WIDER IDENTITY

Our country defeated Hitler before he could develop nuclear armament. At the same time this country

kind of ideal self-image took over America, namely, that of the self-made man with a new and flexible tradition created by self-chosen immigrants on a so-called "empty" continent ready for vast and joint improvisation. This "dream," of course, for a while left out the Indians who had inhabited that "emptiness," and the Blacks whose immigration was anything but self-chosen. Such "oversights," we recognize today, have always been an ugly, if implicit, part of any new "way of life."

History, then, has its (necessarily contradictory) ways of curing itself of pseudo-speciation; <sup>HERE IS THE POINT:</sup> ~~and~~ we must learn to recognize the possible similarities in the potentials of all such ways, even if they seem to endanger our own: and this demands today that we face in all its relativity another modern pseudo-speciation - the creation by the Russian Revolution of a universal super-identity of the proletariate, the worker. Instead of considering this once and for all an insuperable historical dilemma, maybe we could come to see in it also a developmental step in its time and place: a larger unification leading to a new and more inclusive identity within (and towards) a greater political framework acknowledging some other universal characteristics of an all-human identity.

CHINA

On the other hand, we have already pointed to the most powerful example of a collective negative identity attempting to become positive in the form of a radical pseudo-species as exemplified by the highly educated German nation, which when debased by the Treaty of Versailles turned to mystical Aryanism.

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In such historical regressions, we recognize a specific rage which is aroused - in groups as well as in individuals - wherever identity development loses the promise of a traditionally assured wholeness. Such latent rage, in turn, can be <sup>then</sup> cleverly exploited by fanatic and psychopathic leaders.

The negative meaning of "pseudo," when applied to such a catastrophic phenomenon is so striking that one again sometimes wonders whether this little word should ever have been used for more positive historical innovations. Kai Erikson, for sociological reasons, has convincingly claimed that it might be better to call the overall phenomenon we have in mind a psycho-social rather than a "pseudo"-speciation. And, indeed, the term and the concept are part of a psychosocial approach which I have initiated in order to complement Freud's psychosexual theory. Here, to clarify its social nature further, I must also spell out the relationship of "speciation" to the moral development of every individual and group. For mankind is, in Ernst Mayr's terms, the "generalist" animal, with the capacity to settle in, to adapt to, and to develop the most varied environments, from the Arctic to the steaming jungle and to New York. To perform this feat we have a long childhood characterized by a basic minimum of instinctive patterning and a maximum of free instinctual energy available for investment in a variety of basic psychosocial encounters. Every individual conscience is thus part of a communal one, as it partakes in a speciation - that is, in all the ritualizations typical for "our kind."



This (as pointed out) can be seen most clearly in the way in which the process of speciation can arouse the highest kind of discipline and of loyalty, of courage and of self-sacrifice. And in principle, a good communal conscience helps to provide that widened sense of a central, active, and inclusive "I" which can animate human consciousness, while a "bad," over-strict conscience (that is, in psychoanalytic terms, too "super" an "ego") can weigh the "I" down. Thus, human consciousness and conscience, in striving for a wider identity, is always also associated with a negative identity, that is, all that one must not appear to be and yet deeply feels one is; for the name-calling to which one has been exposed from earliest childhood is easily associated with a detested "species." In fact, name-calling is an important function of what Joan Erikson and I have called the "antipathic" adult trait of "rejectivity" which refutes everything and everybody one does not care to be like or to care for. All this points to an important caution which must guide us in investigating any "prescriptions" for human behavior in the future: any critical attention to different speciations must not lead to a diminished concern for the all-human communal values and our readiness to fight for them (if, it is hoped, increasingly nonviolently) and with an ever-widened and intensified concern for an all-human sense of species.

And a worldwide sharing of newly discovered laws of child development and, in fact, of the potentials of the whole human life cycle may before long demonstrate the existence of a

positive challenge in the sense that informed adults, involved in this our "century of the child," will not be able to tolerate the total danger in which the children of the future will live unless a new international ethics governs the earth. Psychological thinking must now lead us to understand the ways in which cultural and national units have lived and fought for a positive identity not as totally exclusive of each other but rather as relative and complementary to each other. This, in the few minutes at my disposal, I can summarize best by confessing that over the years, I have yielded to the temptation of redefining the Golden Rule in terms of a developmental ethics. As I put it once: an adult should strive to do to another what will enhance the other's development (at <sup>or her</sup> his age, in <sup>or her</sup> his condition, and under <sup>or her</sup> his circumstances) while at the same time enhancing the doer's own development (at <sup>or her</sup> his age, in <sup>or her</sup> his condition, and under <sup>or her</sup> his circumstances). For this, of course, we have to learn to understand a lot: but such knowledge today is coming within our grasp. study and in ourselves and in other

Now, I know as well as the next man or woman that individual and collective ethics vary according to specific laws of relativity which must be understood historically as well as psychologically. And so I think that groups living in the same period of history, even if at different stages of collective development, may well learn to develop analogous "golden" lines of communication. The general spread of psychological thinking must eventually lead to an international sharing of worldwide observations on the basic potentials of children which will foster an awareness of the species-wide similarities of given potentials everywhere.

In view of this we may also hope that the tenuous coexistence

~~At the same time~~ Study of history of war may lead to a discussion of



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of ~~human~~ ethics and unrestricted warfare may prove unsupportable in our time. Even the military mind may well come to fear for its historical identity as boundless slaughter replaces tactical warfare. What is, in this, for a true "fighting man?"

One wonders, however, how this deadlock in international morals can be broken by the most courageous protest, the most incisive interpretation, or the most prophetic warning - a warning of catastrophe so all-consuming that most men must ignore it, as they ignore their own death and have learned to ignore the monotonous prediction of hell. For this very reason, it seems, that only a new ethical orientation, a direction toward vigorous cooperation, can free today's energies from their bondage in armed defensiveness. We live at a time in which, in spite of the species-wide destruction possible - we can conceive for the first time of a species-wide ethics such as that which has been formulated by the founders of the great world religions. Ethics, however, cannot be fabricated. Under these conditions, it is all too easy for over-developed nations to believe that nations, too, should treat one another with a superior educative - or clinical attitude. What we have to recommend, then, does not underscore inequalities between human groups but the invariance of respected uniqueness within historical relativities. Insofar as a nation thinks of itself as a unique creation, it may well begin to realize its task as that of maintaining mutuality in international relations. For the only alternative to armed national competition seems to

On the other hand,

~~Simplified~~

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be the effort to activate in relation to one's NEIGHBORS  
(and I capitalize this old word in conclusion) what will  
strengthen their historical development, even as it strengthens  
ours, toward a common future identity. Only thus can we  
apply our golden rule to international relations and to common  
goals in the rapid development of technology and history - and  
thus transcend the dangerous imagery of victory and defeat, of  
subjugation and exploitation which is the heritage of a fragmented  
past.

Finally, to end  
~~to come back to~~ to end  
on a ~~note~~ truly developmental  
ONE SPECIES note

biological affinity

⇒ INFANTS ←

( great potential (FATHERS  
of recognizing (AND  
basic developmental (MOTHERS)  
unity of  
one species.

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